

NAMI Boulder County

Circle of Support

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Boulder County, Colorado

Issue No. 194

- For all those touched by mental illness -

March 2008

Look how far we've come



By Phoebe Norton, former executive director of the Mental Health Center Serving Boulder and Broomfield Counties

It is important to remember how bad things used to be so we never go there again.

My first job in mental health in 1959 was in an old state hospital for the service area of Cleveland, Ohio. The hospital had more than 3000 residents, including some who were developmentally disabled mixed in with the rest. I was an attendant on the 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. shift and rotated as a "fill in" from ward to ward. The hospital had very few staff, so on the "back" wards people weren't seen by psychiatrists very often. Sometimes, I was the only attendant on a ward with more than eighty people. I saw a few people chained to their beds or to potty chairs. Anti-psychotic medications were new and had many bad side effects. Many people were over-medicated to subdue them.

For the most part, the attendants were kind, but the circumstances were inhumane and often traumatic for everyone – patients and staff alike. Sometimes I saw people threatened with electric shock treatment or with isolation. Once I had to take supper to a woman in isolation and feed her through a slot in the door. The cell-like room was totally dark and she was blinded by the light I let in but grateful for kind words and company.

Now these old, state institutions have been closed or

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Look how far we need to go



By Anne Weiher, PhD, who teaches psychology at Metro State College in Denver and works as a professional research associate at CU Boulder.

We have come a long way in our efforts to eradicate the stigma of mental illness, and

we are better educated about these illnesses than we were even twelve years ago when psychology textbooks still spoke of "schizophrenogenic" mothers. Yet, when I teach about brain disorders in my introductory psychology classes, I am often saddened to discover that many students hold old stereotypes about mental illness. We talk about why that is and many of them speak of the huge role the media plays in perpetuating those stereotypes. A student reminded me recently that one of my favorite programs, Law and Order, often portrays individuals with mental illness in a negative light.

I am deeply saddened that it is not easier for someone to acknowledge they have or had a serious mental illness and are stable or in recovery. One of my students who was quite knowledgeable about major depressive disorder spoke of a friend who had the illness in high school. It was only after class that she came to me and said that the "friend" was her. How sad that at 18 or 19 she knows only too well the way colleagues might view her differently if they knew of her prior struggle with depression. I hope someday she and I can stand together and proudly say openly that we are in recovery from major mental illness without fear of retribution and that we will be con-

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NAMI BOULDER COUNTY

1333 Iris Avenue, Boulder
303-443-4591

www.namibouldercounty.org

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Friends of NAMI

We are most thankful for your past and continuing friendship, but our list has grown too large for this small space. Please know how much you mean to NAMI Boulder County.

~

Office Manager, Sharon Bowyer

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NARSAD Cards, Cathy Stiers

Newsletter, Joanne Kelly

Contributing writers for December:

Reg Saner, Alan Kelly,

Anne Weiher, Phoebe Norton

Barbara Connors, Laura Hadaway

Upcoming events**March 3 and 17 - Support Group**

March 13 - Family-to-Family class starts (12-week class)

March 20 - NAMI Boulder County Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Louisville. Feel free to join us.

April 12-19 - 9Health Fair

April 17 - NAMI Boulder County Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Louisville. Feel free to join us.

President's Corner

Untreated mental illness can lead to tragic consequences. The shooting at Northern Illinois University is in the headlines today. Another shocking, devastating campus shooting. How will this event affect the stigma surrounding mental illness? How will it change or confirm what people already believe about mental illness? We still don't have all the details about the situation, but we do know that when Steven Kazmierczak, the shooter, was on

his medication, he was a model student and respected member of society. A hopeful message that could come from this tragedy is that treatment works. In fact, treatment for mental illness has a much higher success rate than treatment for diabetes, heart disease or high cholesterol. Unfortunately, when people stop taking their medications for brain disorders, the results can range from merely frustrating to tragic. Most of the time when someone goes off his meds, it is not headline news. Unless you happen to be Britney Spears. Then it becomes a media freak show. Many people can't get enough of the daily, hourly updates on the Brittany drama, and few in the media have had the decency to treat her, her problem, and her family with the respect they deserve.

I don't know how to make people stay on their medications any more than I know how to get the media and the public to stop obsessing over Britney. All I know is we need to keep talking, keep educating, keep advocating, and keep supporting those with brain disorders and their families. This is what NAMI does, and does well. I want to thank all of you who are members and supporters of NAMI. Without your support we couldn't continue to do what we do.

One of the educational activities we offer that has a lot of impact is the Family-to-Family class. This 12-week class is a soup-to-nuts course on mental illness for family members and loved ones of people with mental illness. We have one class going on now and Laura Hadaway and I will be teaching another one starting in March. Teaching the class is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. The class can be a real help for people dealing with mental illness in their family. I know Joanne and I found it immensely helpful the first time we took the class 6 years ago. The class is continually updated so it is a great way for me to stay current with what's happening in the world of mental illness.

Thank you again to all who support what we do. Together we can make a difference.

Alan Kelly

How far we've come

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transformed into real hospitals with much more adequate staffing. Thankfully, we have learned a lot about “recovery” in the past fifty years. Medications and effective therapy have improved a great deal though they are still not perfect. We know that if people receive good psychiatric treatment and have immediate access to a full continuum of services in their own communities; most will lead meaningful, fulfilling lives.

A danger is that we are not funding these community-based services adequately so that over the last twenty years, increasing numbers of youths and adults with major mental illnesses have landed in correctional facilities. This is intolerable! Many diversion programs (including some here in Boulder County) have proven that with adequate care and services, people with major mental illnesses (even with co-occurring substance abuse disorders) can live safely in their own communities and continue on their way to recovery. We must make certain that we have the funding to use what we know works throughout our country.

Remembering that old state hospital fills me with grief. Knowing that we know how to help most people recover in their own communities and yet we often don't have the resources do it – so that people end on the streets or in jails – fills me with rage. I know I will never be able to do all I want to do about this, but at least I am grateful to have NAMI to give me some kindred spirits and a channel for my need to advocate.

How far we have to go

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gratulated on our recovery. The biggest shame is that stigma keeps people from getting treatment for a highly treatable condition.

I dream of a day when we have the tools to diagnose people accurately and prescribe the right treatment program, including medications, the first time. It takes the average person with bipolar disorder eight years to get diagnosed – for me it was much longer. If it were cancer, I'd be dead.

Far too many people with serious mental illness are homeless or inadequately housed. Many of them live far below the poverty level. Often they yearn for things we take for granted, a warm place to sleep, adequate cooking facilities, a place to shower, and clean clothes.

As Phoebe's column reminds us, in the past far too many individuals were locked away for years in the back wards of mental hospitals.

Today, many of those same individuals are vibrant members of their communities. However, for many others, the closure of those hospitals and the failure of our society to provide for the thousands who were released unprepared into society has meant that many of those suffering from mental illness are further challenged by the stress of living in inhumane conditions. As a society we have failed to address the basic human needs of many of our citizens: the need for food, shelter, self-respect, and acceptance.

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Volunteer Corner



*Barbara Connor,
NAMI Boulder
County Volunteer
Coordinator*

In December, NAMI Colorado awarded a grant to NAMI Boulder County to help us increase our membership. As a result, for the last two months, I have been contacting former participants in Family-to-Family and Visions classes to encourage them to join our organization. In the same conversations, I have been asking for their feedback about the classes they took, some of them several years ago. The main response has

been that the classes were very helpful for several reasons. Not only were they informative, but they also helped people to see they were not alone and that others were facing many of the same issues. People appreciated knowing more about brain processing and they were grateful for the support and leadership they received from the class facilitators.

Approximately 70% of the people I have spoken to have agreed to join NAMI. They responded to the fact that their membership makes it possible for NAMI Boulder County to continue offering Family-to-Family and Visions classes at no charge to other people who need the information and support that

the classes provide. They also wanted to help us continue with our efforts to stamp out stigma against people with mental illnesses and to advocate for fairer laws on the state and federal level. The more members we have, the more political clout we have to persuade legislators of the distinct and pressing needs people with mental illnesses have in medical insurance, prescription benefits, housing, employment, and education.

On the horizon is the 9Health Fair in April. We will need volunteers to staff the information tables at various locations, and I will be contacting those of you who have expressed an interest in volunteering to play that role.

“Parents and Teachers as Allies” training planned for April 5

In cooperation with NAMI Colorado, NAMI Boulder County is sponsoring a training day on April 5 to train teams of four to present a program called Parents and Teachers as Allies. This two-hour in-service program focuses on helping school professionals and families within the school community better understand the early warning signs of mental illnesses in children and adolescents and how best to intervene so that youth with mental health treatment needs are linked with services. It also covers the lived experience of mental illnesses and how schools can best communicate with fami-

lies about mental-health-related concerns.

Components of the in-service education program for school professionals include:

- **Welcome** – an education professional who is also a family member welcomes the school professionals and introduces the topics to be covered, often with a personal story.
- **Early Warning Signs of Mental Illnesses** – a facilitator walks the school professionals through the early warning signs.
- **Family Response** – a parent or caregiver of a child with mental illness covers the predictable stages

of emotional reactions among family members dealing with the challenges of mental illness and the lived experience of raising a child with a mental illness.

- **Living with Mental Illness** – a mental health consumer that experienced the early onset of mental illness shares a view from the inside, including a discussion about the positive and negative impact that their school experience had on their life.
- **Group Discussion**

If you have questions or would like to learn more, please contact Joanne Kelly at 303-494-4882.

Your ill relative has landed in jail. Now what?



*By Laura
Hadaway,
J.D*

As a criminal defense attorney and the mother

of an adult son with mental illness, I have often found my heart and my brain at odds when our family was in crisis and the criminal justice system became part of the picture. There is typically no simple, clean path to follow as we try and help our loved ones. But one thing is clear: they need our help, and our assistance can be invaluable if we keep in mind a few guidelines. Before you take any action, be sure to step back and ask yourself if what you are contemplating doing is helpful in the bigger picture.

First, when a person has been arrested, consider the possibility that they might be better off, at least temporarily, if they stay in custody. It is not always possible to bond them out, but once bond is set, consider carefully if that is the best thing to do. Is he out of control and a danger to himself or others? It may be better to leave him in custody and begin to engage the facility's medical department. Provide information about his illness and medications.

If you have a doctor or therapist available to communicate with the jail, ask them to do so immediately. This communication can be difficult because the medical departments in jails are often overwhelmed. Be persistent and respectful and emphasize that you are hoping to help both your loved one and the facility that must maintain him.

Second, your loved one must have a criminal defense attorney. This is not a system to navigate on your own. Public defenders are court-appointed defense attorneys available to defendants with low incomes. We are fortunate to have a high-caliber public defender system in Colorado. If your loved one is eligible, encourage him or her to use the public defender. If they remain in custody, a public defender is automatic. If they are out of custody and make too much money, or if they live with you and you make too much, then you must retain a private criminal defense attorney. The public defender will have a list of private defense attorneys who will work on a sliding scale. Whether money is an issue or not, shop for an attorney as you do other purchases. Ask others for recommendations. Ask for a free consultation. Ask about their experience with mental illness and the type of

charges pending. Ask about their experience in the court where your loved one will appear. Ask what they expect can be done. Ask what it will cost.

Third, stay out of the case and let the legal counsel tell you what you can do to help. Mostly your role will be to support your loved one. If you happen to be the victim of the case – which is not all that unusual – your role will be very complicated. Sometimes the hurt and anger can overwhelm your compassion. Over time, you may want to reestablish the broken relationship and rebuild trust. Be thoughtful when you consider what you will say. Be truthful always, but don't say too much.

Remember, nobody knows your loved one better than you do. Seek information, be open to advice but trust yourself as you assist your loved one on this complex journey. Keep asking the question: In the big picture, will this help or hurt? If you don't know the answer, wait to act until you do. Do the best you can and forgive yourself if you make a mistake. Don't forget to forgive your loved one, too. Be there for him and if you can't, ask a friend to be there in your place. Never, never give up!

Poetry of Up and Down

by Reg Saner, Board Member

Last year an email from one Thom Schramm asked my permission to reprint something I'd written. He was editing an anthology of contemporary poems whose theme was "the moods of manic-depression." I said, "Okay, use it," but didn't add what I was thinking.

Wouldn't such a book would be a real downer? Wouldn't it be unreadably glum?

Wrong and wrong. Months passed, then two handsome paperback copies of *Living in Storms* arrived as freebies from Eastern Washington University Press. On actually dipping into its pages I found that *Living in Storms* wasn't a sad gathering after all.

"The poets represented here," writes David Wojahn in his Foreword, "are remarkably disinclined to self-indulgence and self-pity." Instead, the effect of their art

is to redeem pain and sorrow, by virtue of the solace in poetry's way of saying. Thus, rather than a warehouse of hot tears and blue moods, the book's poems transmute the tribulation of mental illness to a reader's empathic experience of what's dearest among our human capacities: fellow feeling.

Eight groups of poems explore the personal and familial aspects of bipolar disorder: How It Is, In the Mood, Remembering the Episodes, Characters, Friends and Family, The Artist, Daily Shifts, and With the Seasons.

Although inclusion in the anthology doesn't mean an author is bipolar, virtually all its contributors do seem to know at first-hand the emotional cost of brain disorders. Admittedly, my involvement with NAMI confers on the book a special fascination. Then, too,

because I've either known or had dealings with a good many of the eighty writers, it's been quite a surprise to find we were – all along, and usually unbeknownst to us – in the same boat. Scanning the list of authors I often found myself saying, "Even she? Even he?" Saddened to learn of their trouble but glad that I cared.

Over the years I've received more than half a hundred anthologies in the mail, and have read here and there in each. Not till *Living in Storms*, however, have I read one cover to cover – and continue to re-read. Obviously, NAMI members less keen on poetry are hardly likely to share my enthusiasm. Even so, *Living in Storms* is yet another step toward widening sympathy for victims of all mental illnesses, and further diminishing stigma.

Mark your calendar now:

Beautiful Art for Beautiful Minds

A benefit for Chinook Clubhouse

May 9, 2008

5:30 – 8:00

**at the St. Julien Hotel
900 Walnut St., Boulder**

Silent auction of artwork by local artists
Refreshments catered by the St. Julien
Live music

NAMI Support Group

*For all those touched by
mental illness (consumers
and family members)*

**First and third Monday
evenings, 7:00-8:30**

**Boulder Community
Hospital
(Alpine and Broadway)**

Call Anne Weiher at 303-
442-9209 or 720 839-4139
for details.

Education and Support Groups

NAMI CLASSES IN BOULDER COUNTY

On-going free education and support classes offering information on brain disorders, how to cope, and how to advocate. We keep an ongoing list for these classes. For information or to reserve a place, call us at 303-443-4591.

- ▶ **Family-to-Family Class** – A free 12-week program for family members, friends or caregivers who have a loved one with a brain disorder. Next class starts March 13. Call today to reserve a place.
- ▶ **Colorado Visions** (formerly Visions for Tomorrow) – A free multi-week program consisting of workshops for caregivers of children and adolescents with brain disorders.

NAMI FAMILY SUPPORT

- ▶ **Support group for anyone touched by mental illness** (family members and consumers) - First and third Monday nights, 7-8:30 at Boulder Community Hospital on Broadway. Call Anne Weiher at 303-442-9209 for details.

DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR DISORDER

- ▶ **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) Longmont**
Mondays, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at Longmont United Hospital, Gaugin Room, 1950 Mountain View, Longmont. Contact Diane Dworkin-Wagner at 303-682-2911 Email: twinpeaksdbsa@hotmail.com
- ▶ **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) Boulder**
Two peer-only meetings a month and one friends and family meeting per month. Contact David at 720-989-4931 or email (preferred) david.dbsa.boulder@gmail.com.
- ▶ **CareTogether Support Group** for spouses and partners of people with bipolar disorder and depression, second Mondays, 7-8:30, Baha'i Center in Lafayette. 303-507-8533, caretogether@gmail.com
- ▶ **The Robert D. Sutherland Center for the Evaluation and Treatment of Bipolar Disorder**
Visit www.rdsfoundation.org or call Dr. Alisha Brosse (303/492-5680) for information about a skills training group and educational seminars on bipolar disorder.

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Parents Experiencing Challenging Kids Support Group (PECK) - Meets second Sunday of each month at the Huckleberry in Louisville, 9:00 a.m. Contact Harriet Austin at 303-284-9863 or austinhb@hotmail.com

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

Support group for people with OCD, their families and friends. First and third Wednesdays, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Mental Health Center, Norton Room, 1333 Iris Avenue, Boulder. Contact Brent, 303-422-9704, Arlene, 303-670-9691, or Ilene, 303-938-1360.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE ANONYMOUS

(www.ocdcolorado.com) and **SOCIAL PHOBICS ANONYMOUS** (www.healsocialanxiety.com). For further information on both groups, call John at 303-325-3143

CHINOOK CLUBHOUSE, BOULDER

Chinook Clubhouse is dedicated to enhancing the recovery of men and women with mental illnesses. It provides opportunities for members to live, work, learn, and socialize while contributing their talents in a community of mutual support. The Chinook Clubhouse offers transitional employment opportunities. Call 303-440-4842 for information (www.chinookclubhouse.org).

"SOFT VOICES" DROP-IN CENTER, LONGMONT

Resource and friendship center for adults with mental illness. Tuesdays, 10:00-noon; Thursdays and Fridays, 1:00-3:00. 5th & Kimbark, downstairs. Art sessions led by Mimi Farrelly meets on Fridays, 1:00-3:00 p.m. For more information, contact Gil at 303-776-0410.

Everyone is welcome to participate!

INTERNET RESOURCES

Visit the NAMI (national) Web site at www.nami.org
Visit the NAMI Boulder County Web site at www.namibouldercounty.org

If you need help finding information online, contact the sources below. Service is confidential and available for free.

Consumer Health Resource Library

Located at Longmont Hospital, 1950 West Mountain View Avenue, Main Entrance. Call 303-651-5112 for hours.

Grillo Health Care Information Center

Located at Boulder Public Library, 11th and Arapahoe, Main Branch, 2nd floor. Call 303-441-4174 for hours.

Join the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Your dues include membership in NAMI National, NAMI Colorado and NAMI Boulder County. You will get the newsletters published by each of these organizations

- \$35 per year individual/family membership
- \$3 per year for people with a limited income
- I want to support NAMI Boulder County with a tax-deductible gift of \$ _____

Your membership dues and gifts will help provide support, education and advocacy for Boulder County individuals and families who are coping with serious mental illness.

Does your employer have a matching gifts program?

I am interested in:

- Learning about volunteer opportunities, either ongoing or one-time only
- Arranging for speaker or presentations on mental illness for my club, church, work or other group
- Helping with advocacy efforts by writing letters/making phone calls to my elected representatives

Name _____ Email address _____

Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Home phone _____ Alternate phone _____

**Mail this form with your check to: NAMI Boulder County
1333 Iris Avenue, Boulder, CO 80304**
